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Mossi Woman Spinning.
From the Mission of the White
Fathers at Ouagadougou.

133 are bordered with hills. Nevertheless, it may be said that Mossi country is flat. It is covered with the classic bush of the Sudan with [137] its small shrubs and tall grass interspersed with bastard mahogany, /7/ huge trunks of the baobabs, and tamarind and silk-cotton trees, thicker on the banks of the Volta rivers, thinner around the villages.

241 The country is quite fertile and easily provides for its inhabitants.
262 The various kinds of millet grow well, especially the small white variety (Pennisetum spicatum) which, mashed and boiled, is the staple of the diet and sorghum, or large red millet, which is used to prepare the famous beer of the country. The horses eat the latter kind, although they prefer the large white millet. Around the huts maize grows well in soil fertilized by the daily accumulation of waste. It is a welcome source of grain when the millet reserves of the previous year are running low and the current harvest has not yet matured. Maize fields are surrounded with a double row of sorghum and often [283] with a double row of a fiber plant called bérensé, a sort of hemp which the natives use to make ropes. After the maize has been harvested, the field is planted with previously prepared tobacco seedlings. Finally, the sunken areas created when huts are built, as well as all slightly damp places, are planted with gombo, okra, which is highly valued as a sauce ingredient.

[311] During the rainy season no piece of land remains unused around the villages, and when the red millet ripens and the ears join across the path, passage becomes difficult. Even the hut roofs bear all kinds [415] of calabash plants. These supply the housewives with gourds that fulfill the purposes served by our plates, dishes, glasses, and basins; the travellers with their flasks; the snuff-takers with their boxes; and the sorcerers with their spirit-calling instruments. The large gourds that are used to make drums grow among the shoots of maize. In the marshes near the watercourses where water lies stagnant, rice fields are planted, but rice is a luxury food, hard to cultivate because of [554] the care it requires. The natives use it only on feast days or when they wish to honor a distinguished guest. Cotton is sown in damp places among the stalks of large red millet, and it is harvested much later. Peanuts and peas also take up part of the cultivated land, while beans creep along the ground between the shoots of small millet. Peppers, sesame, the indigo plant, yams, manioc, sweet potatoes, and a small

226 the sacrifices, these amphibians have no scruples about biting a foot or leg. However, the crocodiles in these ponds are seldom large enough to sever a limb.

In those places where the water is somewhat shallow and flows for some period of time, the bank dwellers make dams of tree branches intertwined with millet stalks. These are placed diagonally to the current and lead to a sort of funnel closed with a net. The fish follow the dam, enter the funnel, and get caught in the meshes of the net.

221 356 The major ceremonies also take place at this time of year. This is when the Day of the Dead is celebrated, when the koure is held. When the first gust of wind unroofs a few huts or at least indicates those that need a new covering, everyone sets down to the task. The thatch cut in December is used for the purpose. Before the soukala, [283] [857] children and youths knot blades of straw with strings of hemp and plait séko. They also go into the bush to cut down branches and to gather bark which serves to bind the branches together. When everything is ready, the head of the household calls his people and gathers a few neighbors. The roof is made and laid within a short morning. This task must be repeated every two years or so, and it is men's work entirely. At the beginning of winter, the villages take on a smart 221 new look. This is when people think of building a new hut, the man who has acquired a new wife, the child who has grown into a young man and who can no longer live with his mother, the man whose wealth has increased by a few head of cattle or a horse. The women fetch water, the children knead the mortar with their feet and carry to the mason the mud clods prepared by the old men. These tasks are not laborious, and they are accomplished with merrymaking.

Now the thorn bushes have grown back, the rains will soon fall again, and already a few gusts of wind herald the coming winter. The Pleiades have appeared on the horizon, and the baobabs are budding once more. It is necessary to take up the hoe again and to sow; this is a good thing, because the millet is running low in the granaries. The working cycle we have described must begin anew. And year follows year without bringing any major changes in the life of the common man.

[i.e., February-April. -Analyst]

443 rice, beans, karite butter, roasted peanuts sold in little heaps for one centime, raw peanuts, and all the spices for the sauce. Yarsé or Haoussa girls walk from group to group with small basins full of kola nuts, and chiefs and rich men buy one or two nuts which they usually share with their followers. Foreign traders sit under shelters of foliage or millet stalks and sell a few pearls, salt or copper bars, henna or blue dye, while bald-headed vultures hovering above the butchers point out their location to everyone. The meat on sale consists of a goat or sheep, sometimes a beef found dead in the bush or more rarely one slaughtered especially for the occasion. Some people bring chicks and occasionally a hen. This is about all that is to be found.

443 To these comestibles drink must be added. The women who sell
273 millet beer occupy a whole section of the market, and this section is not the least frequented nor the quietest spot. While butchers may be located by watching the vultures, it is possible to spot the tavern-keepers merely by cocking one's ears. Their presence is revealed by the cries, the beating of drums, the hubbub inevitably connected with a crowd slightly the worse for drink. The Mossi undoubtedly drink a lot of millet beer, but the beverage sold at the marketplace does not easily go to the head. The beer that is boiled again (tēsé /sic/) is far more dangerous with its rather high percentage of alcohol, and hydromel (bésé) is even more so. The latter is made of honey and millet flour boiled in water, to which barm is added to induce fermentation. These two beverages are truly potent, especially when drunk
[579] alternately. This is why brawls occur rather frequently, and sometimes real battles in which people are wounded. These are drunkards' quarrels. Men are indeed the same everywhere, and how many fairs without a drunk or two are to be found in our own country? It must be said, however, that more intoxicated natives are to be met with in Mossi country than in France.

443 The market begins at about ten o'clock and usually closes at two; the important ones open around noon and last until nightfall. When we discuss the industries, we shall mention the other products which are sold there.

283 Weaving is the most widespread industry, the one that all men may
[296] practice and all do practice to some extent. The cotton is ginned,
462 and the thread prepared by the women. Delafosse, in his work on the Siéna, has described the process accurately: "When the cotton has been separated from the husk, the seeds are removed with an iron rod

283 which is rolled with both hands on the boll lying on a flat stone; /55/ the seeds are thus driven forward and picked up by hand... The cotton is coiled around a wooden rod which the woman holds in her left hand; with her right hand she grasps and stretches a strand of cotton from the distaff and winds it around the upper tip of a wooden needle, which bears at its lower end a sort of heavy clay ball and which is caused to spin rapidly, like a top, on the bottom of a wooden dish by the motion of the right hand. Extended between the left hand which holds the distaff and the right hand which secures and spins the top, the cotton stretches and becomes thread, which coils around the needle of the top... The thread is later uncoiled, then wound again around a wooden rod to make a thick cylindro-conical ball. When the thread is to be used for weaving, it is stretched around four stakes set in the ground in the shape of a very elongated quadrilateral." (2)

2. Delafosse, Le peuple Siena /The Siena People/, p. 58.

286 All the young men learn how to weave; it is part of their education. The loom, like the spindle described above, is the kind used by all the Negroes of West Africa, and it is described by Delafosse as follows: "The slat loom is suspended from a piece of wood resting on two forked stakes; the shuttle is canoe-shaped and hollow; the treadled lever permits alternate crossing of the two rows of slats /heddles/; the threads are stretched by means of a large stone resting on the ground in front of the weaver who sits on a crude stool placed behind the trestle which supports the loom (here usually the weaver sits on the ground), so that his feet come to rest on the pedals. This apparatus is usually set up in the shade of the large trees which stand on the village grounds, or else under shelters of foliage built especially for the purpose. The cotton fabric is woven in strips 10 to 15 centimeters wide; several of them are sewn together to reach the width required for breechcloths and garments." (3)

3. Ibid., p. 59.

[531] The fabric strips are not always solid in color. Often the warp consists of threads dyed red or dark blue and mixed with white strands, while the woof is white. Some people know how to make strips with small blue or red checks which are quite attractive. All weavers are

222 Let us now proceed to the baobab.
137 It is called touéra or touéga in Mossi (sira or izira in Bambara). It is to be found most everywhere in the Mossi bush, and especially in rocky, hilly spots near large streams.

The fruit of the baobab is gathered from December to April. It is a sort of huge green almond hanging from a stem that often
252 reaches 25 or 30 centimeters in length. One breaks the shell, removes the flesh, and mashes it in the mortar (this, of course, is done by the women). Once this is done, the resulting meal is strained through a straw strainer. It is now ready to eat.

This is called toïdésoum in Mossi, tiondé-boé in Peuhl, siramogou in Mandé (from sira, "baobab" and mogou, "flour").
[438] Colloquially, Europeans call it "monkey bread." It is sold on Mossi markets as on the markets of Bambara country.

To prepare it for consumption, this meal is thinned with milk, or water if there is no milk, or else mixed with millet flour. The latter mixture is called sangaré ni siramogou in Bambara ("millet flour and baobab flour"). The meal may also be mixed with néré flour.

It is not only the fruit of the baobab, however, that is utilized. The fresh green leaves are used as a sauce ingredient. The dried leaves are used to make tonéra (lalo in Foutanké /Futajalonke?/, namourou or namougou in Bambara, oro in Peuhl). The leaves are dried and crushed in a mortar to make a powder that is added to sauce.

283 Finally, let us add that the bark of the baobab is used to make rope.

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137 After the karité, néré, and baobab, we must list the tamarind tree (Tamarindus indica), koussouga or poussouga in Mossi, n'tomi in Bambara.

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137 The fruit of the tamarind is a pod, longer than a finger /500/ and about the same thickness, that ripens between January and April.
263 It is a yellow-green brown. When cut along its length, it is found to contain some ten little round fruits, the size of half a hazelnut, lying in a row within the greenish pulp. Only the dried pod is used, after removing the little fruits which have a rather pleasing taste when fresh, something between the kola nut and the hazelnut. When the pod is dry, however, the fruits are also dried out and hard, and they are discarded.

222 137 261 Séba is a kind of long, poisonous, black turnip which is eaten only in times of famine and after protracted cooking.

Seba and vidiba caused the death of many people during the last Mossi famine by giving them dysentery.

137 231 /511/ As for wild fodder found in Mossi territory, there is first of all kénibédo, that grows in bunches 30 centimeters high in damp hollows. Its leaves are rudimentary. It is severed 20 centimeters from the ground and stored during the dry season.

Then there are the fodder plants belonging to the papilionaceous family, densa and youbenga. The tiny stem of densa or youbenga is not severed from the plant itself, which reaches a height of 0.30 or 0.40 meter in both cases. Horses eat them either green or dry, indiscriminately.

137 314 283 Finally, let us say a word about souga, a sort of wild hemp called thus by the Mossi. The Nounouma call it boupo, and the Kassouna bénédévio. It is found only in certain parts of Mossi territory, but it grows throughout Gourounsi lands. Its bark yields very tough white fibers which the natives use in the manufacture of rope, string or thread for fishing implements. The bark does not keep through the dry season, so it is reduced to fibers during the rainy season. The fibers, on the other hand, can take the most intensive dryness without deteriorating. Souga is not cultivated.

222 433 We are now finished with Mossi gathering activities. They have a certain importance, as we have just seen, the same one on the whole as in other Sudanese populations. They are infinitely less important than cultivation, of course, but only slightly less so than stockbreeding, and they must be placed on the same level as the hunt. They are far more important than fishing or arboriculture.

245 433 The latter deserves no real mention. It hardly exists among the Mossi. It is limited to what we described earlier about the rônier and to the planting, here and there, of a few papaw trees.

433 In short, cultivation comes first, with stockbreeding trailing far behind, then gathering and hunting on the same level, then fishing and finally arboriculture.

010 /512/ Industries flourish among the Mossi. We shall review one by one, in detail, the various trades they exercise.

285 435 5. Straw dishes made with doudouma (yellow), doudoumidou (red), and doudousabalé (shiny grey). They are worth 300 cowries.

6. Dishes made of gansacé straw (yellow) and doudoumidou straw (red) worth 250 cowries.

7. Dishes made of gansacé and sepso straw (sepso is dyed red with mono). The larger ones are worth 350 cowries, the smaller ones 250.

There are no basket makers at Ouagadougou proper, but there are many people in neighboring villages who work at this trade.

The basket maker's only tool is the lépéré-pime, a thick iron needle hooked at the head and adorned with small stripes, /527/ which serves to stitch the straw used for baskets and trays. The lépéré-pime is made by the blacksmith, and it is worth 50 cowries.

Gansacé is also used in the manufacture of bracelets, cords, and lids.

285 294 The maker of straw hats must be included with the basket maker. Both trades belong together.

To present one of them, here is Tenda Ouidiraogo, a Mossi. He tills the soil during the rainy season, and he makes straw hats during the dry season.

Hats are made with kansé, a gramineous plant that grows along watercourses and ponds.

283 285 294 This grass is made into string. First it is placed in water to be softened, and then it is sectioned into two sprigs which are also immersed in water. They are rubbed and twisted by hand upon the thigh. The two sprigs coil together and make string that is fairly strong, although breakable by hand.

First, enough of this string is prepared for the manufacture of a hat.

285 294 The hat makers have a sort of block called dogoma, made of a tripod stick with a vertical stem. They use it to make their hats, which are the ordinary pointed straw hats common to all of West Africa, and which are found in the Sudan as well as in Guinea. These hats come way down on the back of the neck and make their wearers look like Calabrian bandits. It must be said, however, that among the Mossi there is another type of straw hat, which is swollen, rounded, and partly covered with leather patches. It is

286 There may be five weaver-cultivators in a small village, or fifteen in a large one.

286 283 Customers bring the weaver the cotton thread spun by their wives, for spinning is a family affair. The women spread out the tufts of raw cotton on a small board and extract the seeds by pressing upon them. Then they spin small quantities of cotton between their fingers and thus make it into threads which they coil around a twig. The threads are handed to the weaver in this form.

286 The weaver uncoils the threads and sets them on his loom, which is very primitive. It is the same one used throughout West Africa, and it is called niri in Mossi. The cotton strips are usually from 8 to 10 centimeters wide. Their length, which is quite variable, may reach 50 meters. The weaver makes his loom himself.

Let us present an Ouagadougou weaver, Beïdou Ninkéma, the head of a soukala. He has two wives and no children. He tills the soil during the rainy season and weaves during the dry season. His fields net him more than his trade, because the Yarsé also work at the weaver's trade, and since they are more skillful at it than the Mossi their competition is formidable. /533/ The customers bring him thread, and he makes it into cotton strips. He is paid 500 [435] cowries to make the strips needed for a skirt. Sixty strips are needed to make one skirt.

[294] Our weaver is also a tailor, but only on occasion, and incidentally a tailor of the lowest order for he can only make skirts and cloaks. He cannot make trousers. He makes a cloak for 0.50 franc, a skirt [435] for 0.20 franc, with the fabric supplied, of course.

286 Let us add that child-weavers are also to be found among the 857 Mossi. They make pétala.

291 "Pétala," says the Cahier des Rapports of the circle /of Ouagadougou/, "are small, very narrow strips, from 10 to 25 millimeters wide, made of multicolored threads, yellow, red, blue, green, etc., dyed in the territory and woven by children on simplified looms.

"Those strips, which are very strong, are used as trouser belts.

[435] "Pétala is worth a little under 0.10 franc a meter, and its sale nets a small profit to the children who make it and who sell it themselves on Mossi markets.